

THE PASSAGE

POST-PUNK POETS



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PASS

POST-

POE

THE
SAGE
PUNK
ETS

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THE PASSAGE

POST-PUNK POETS

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wicks/Liverpool.



The Passage/CND/Pickwicks/Liverpool.



PREFACE

As impossible as it may seem now, when I was about fourteen years of age, in St-Lambert, Quebec, a long bridge away from the Island of Montreal, a friend of mine named Étienne used to bring me Passage LPs to listen to. This was in the early 1980s and, of course, there were no CDs or Internet, so the only way anyone in Canada – of all places! – was likely to hear about a Manchester-based post-punk band was through a) the NME, b) the indie record shop on The Plateau that sold the NME (a few weeks late) or c) sometimes, a local radio station that was into something good and alternative.

Étienne and I were in thrall to the Cherry Red and Mute labels especially. We were eclectic – if it was British we likely listened to it the first day it came into the shop, and swooned. We had other favourites, including Eyeless In Gaza, Fad Gadget, Depeche Mode, and Echo & The Bunnymen. But we were particularly fascinated by The Passage.

For pubescent young men of a certain bent, The Passage were nothing short of extraordinary. Their music – stark, rhythmic, often hostile, and decidedly eccentric – was matched by vocal performances that rose to the occasion of the lyrics – which were like nothing before or since. This book is, as a book will be, focused on the text, the words, the lyrics, the ‘poems’ that made up these songs.

But what made them so unusual, so original, so bloody compelling?

Firstly, they were erudite. They seemed to possess shreds of Donne or Shakespeare, as if those poets had had their language torn off while leaping over a barbed wire fence. They also seemed driven by a very astute political vision – anarchic, anti-clerical, borderline evil – which, fused with bleakly graphic sex and drug references, made the whole a potent mix indeed. The Stranglers might sing about Trotsky being killed with an ice-pick – but The Passage, you imagined, might actually be Trotsky, or his killer, or at least know that sort of person.

We were not sheltered, but nor were we anarcho-syndicalist atheistic heroin users into BDSM. The Passage, by way of the lyrics and vocals of Dick Witts, seemed to be. At the time, we did not know about Joy Division (who had opened for The Passage), nor did we know much about the yelping Morrissey (though he had tried out to be the singer for The Passage). But we did know that the carefully, beautifully designed black and red LPs from The Passage would unlock a terrifying, shocking, and yes, very viscerally funny world.

There is a strong vein of satire, the theatre of cruelty, Dadaism, and de Sade, in The Passage. Their songs veered between provocation, and a pristine transcendence, a quality of lyricism one might find at two in the morning (it is always two in the morning in the world of

The Passage), if one was both a poet and a bit of a madman. Of all the bands active at the time, none approach, in their work, the potency of literary achievement (the darkness, the gravitas, the intensity, the curious gothic drama clapped into minimalistic irons). Consider ‘the shadows’ – as grave and lovely a moment as indie ever created. I suppose if The Velvet Underground had grown up in the North of England, and had Thatcherism and Larkinism to contend with, they might have sounded like this.

It is fashionable these days to suggest that Ian Curtis was a genius. Early one Friday, Dick met Ian Curtis by chance; it was the day before Curtis killed himself. It is going to become fashionable, I hope, to finally recognise the genius of The Passage, as envisioned and written into language by Dick Witts. We now know the Nobel can go to songwriters, and songwriting is considered literature. This is therefore my small way of thanking these artists, thirty-five years later, for all the darkly inspiring, disturbing and haunting worlds they introduced myself and my friend to, and of passing on this great work to future readers.

Todd Swift

THAT ONE WORD FUCKED THEIR HEART

The lyrics of punk rock generally signalled a narrowing down of attitudes. For eighteen months or so in the late 1970s the only notions with any real currency were the spiky triumvirate of cynicism, confrontation and shock. And so, perhaps inevitably, the lyrics of post-punk would go on to engage in a widening out of both subject matter and structural approach.

In fact, the post-punk era saw the emergence of several significant lyrical stylists, and Manchester in particular had more than its fair share of adventurous wordsmiths. Right from the start, Howard Devoto displayed an urge to articulate an arresting array of attitudes and ideas, whilst John Cooper Clarke could cram a clutch of quotable one liners into every stanza. Ian Curtis adopted an intimate and often confessional form of soul searching, Linder Sterling examined gender identity in both physical and philosophical terms, whereas Mark E. Smith developed his own novelistic kitchen sink gothic.

Meanwhile, Dick Wits of The Passage was busy creating an equally idiosyncratic and illuminating body of work – texts which were sharp, literate and provocative. On numerous occasions, Wits claimed that every song he wrote was based around just three words; *power*, *fear* and *love*. Yet, rather than restricting his choice of subject matter, this approach seemed to open the floodgates to a broad range of topics, including sexism,

corruption, emotional hierarchies, personal liberty, societal control and a whole spectrum of physical and mental desires.

At the heart of Witts' writing style is a rigorous editing process. His texts can sometimes feel ruthlessly pared down. Phrases are often presented pruned of all connective tissue, so the listener or reader is plunged straight into the heart of the issue, with no extraneous information – a method Witts described in a 1982 *Melody Maker* interview as 'getting the maximum play out of the minimum amount of material'.

'Tangled' presents a prime example of this tactic. The text may be stark and skeletal, but the situation it conjures up is simultaneously heavily etched, yet wide open to interpretation. Elsewhere, 'man of war' shows Witts' skill at editing together a series of terse, vivid couplets which don't sit atop the music so much as sear themselves into it.

Sometimes he deconstructs a topic by listing and categorising. In '2711' he tackles the subject of perfume (usually the source of much mystery and romance in lyrics and poetry), by observing it as the somewhat sinister product of scientific and industrial processes. Here, white coated lab technicians blend the most unromantic of components.

it's got the sperm of a whale, it's got the bile of a cat
it's got sex organs from a deer: I smell a rat

it's got the glands of a beaver, it's got naphtha, it's got oil
it's got acid and copra and tar: it makes me boil

In the world of post-punk, expression and communication were always privileged over entertainment, to the degree that a band's value would often be determined by its perceived seriousness – whether that be political or existential. From *The Passage's* very first songs, there was no question about the seriousness of this particular band's intent. And it's fair to say, political statements don't come much more head on than writing a song about the Troubles in Northern Ireland and calling it 'troops out'.

Yet, whilst Witts was not averse to making the occasional direct statement, the majority of his songs are far harder to decode. Is he addressing you as a character? Is he talking in ironic terms? Is he deliberately offering several opposing arguments within one text? The answer to all these questions is sometimes yes, sometimes no.

But, for all Witts' obsession with structure and form, he's far from being a purveyor of dry, academic experimentation. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he weaves plenty of humour into his texts. His words are frequently funny, bitchy and parodic. One need only glance at 'hip rebels', 'taboos' or 'dogstar' to see he is a sneaky social satirist, keen to prick pretensions and point out the pointless.

And yet, the topic which comes up more than any other in these pages is sex. Encompassing the personal and the political, the repressed and the so-called perverse, perhaps Witts' greatest talent with words is – if you'll forgive the phrasing – his ability to come at sex from a variety of unusual angles. From the uneasy dialogue of 'carnal', to the test tube breeding and designer babies of 'xoyo', from the lovemaking guidebook of 'taboos', to the simmering desires of 'watching you dance', sex is everywhere.

Above all, these texts are an entreaty to push beyond society's narrow perceptual limits, to celebrate, explore and experiment with sexual diversity. To quote the comedian John Dowie; 'God had a great sense of humour. He said to himself, 'I'm going to create eight or nine different sexes. And say there's only two.'

Reading back over Witts' lyrics today, it's interesting to see how often he employs the words 'dance' or 'dancing' to imply coitus. On one level, this may seem almost coy – especially considering the frank nature of much of the subject matter. Yet, on a deeper level, he is clearly connecting with rock 'n' roll's original primal intent. Rock 'n' roll being both a music and dance style, and a description of the sex act itself.

There is an often-held opinion which maintains that rock lyrics are disposable adornments, unworthy of study when removed from their musical setting, and certainly not worth consideration in terms of poetry.

I'd venture the opening verse of 'watching you dance' makes a very strong case for the defence.

the sense of release
watching you dance
pressing on air
through your thigh and your hands
the curve and the glide
the spin and the stride
the beat and the wave
the spring and the ride

Richard Witts has been my good friend for over thirty years. Yet, should I ever attempt to engage him in conversation about *The Passage* or his texts, he will only discuss them in the most humorous and flippant of terms. He tends to play down both his writing's intent and the work which went into its creation. Perhaps he believes he has outgrown his youthful writings.

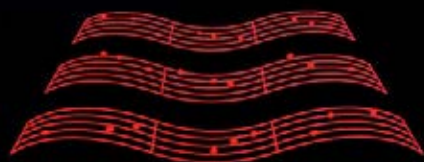
Or, more likely, that the passing of time has rendered them irrelevant. If so, he's mistaken. The truth is, his texts still possess an impressive power, a barbed wit and a complex sensuality.

With or without their musical accompaniment, these words deserve your attention.

Graham Duff

wave

the passage



PASSAGE



dark times

hours of fun with bottles and jokes
tubes of glue cans of coke
hundreds of records thousands of groups
video games wet-look suits
we love it love it love it all
so much to do like colouring hair
food to freeze booze to burn
and everyone's stoned just roaming around
picking up things then putting them down ha ha

we live in pleasant times, pleasant times
but you know deep inside
we're keeping quiet about something

everything's fine wonderful dreams
pills to swallow needles to clean
the curtains are drawn day and night
we don't want to watch any drama outside
we hate it hate it hate it hate it all
if you didn't know us you'd think it bizarre
everyone charged up falling apart
it's all so sticky so very queer and
we can't work out what's happening here

we've got some peace of mind, peace of mind
but you know deep inside
we're scared out of our wits

we're dancing through dark times
dark times, dark times

beechem and beyer, bulmers and cross
airfix and rizla, hoffman la roche
have you any spare? it's put to good use
haven't you heard the terrible news?
we need it need it need it need it all
we take them for laughs they give us the shakes
they twist us around turn our back on our brain
so everyone's stoned just stumbling around
pick up a gun and empty it out ha ha

we've got a little time, too little time
but you know deep inside
we're at the end of the line

we're dancing through dark times
sailing through dark times, dark times

we never want to change, we're trying not to change
but we know deep inside
it's time for the big one
as we dance through dark times, dark times, dark times

clear as crystal

excuse me america
where no town not graced in verse
no fame not named in song
no law not laid for long

we were lost in your land 'til fm tv guiding hand
we now see young to old disney world map out your soul
you're the haves we're having-nots where we have head-ofs you
have gods
but we been saved through tv screen ernest angley made us clean

now it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
'cause you believe in pfpfpf

this we will repeat for the hard of hearing:
land of the new wireless home of the hidden voice
a special blessing from the hand of him
come floating to you down waves of sin

see my heart pumped to scale blown dead big by cathode ray
hear these words from my soul fire your mind burn a hole
and watch these hands reaching out harvesting bank account

so it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
'cause you believe in pfpfpf

*jesus was a cowboy god's own country son
blessed are the peacemakers the colts the gatling guns
jesus the lone ranger – twelve tontos by his side
the stars tell us where he was born the stripes the way he died*

god the banker god the sun god the fireman got my gun
down the cable love and peace channel twenty holy see
so move a mountain light a path send donation all you have
usa born again one enormous talking head

'cause it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
it's clear as crystal cathedral crystal
if you believe in pfpfpf

*i sing because i'm happy
i sing because i'm free
his eye is on the communist
he's looking after me*



man of war

burn for burn stripe for stripe wound for wound hip and thigh
the insolent cut down as grass all others serve his perfect hand

a man of war this man of war
here and there a little murder to make sure
that everything is as it was before

burn for burn stripe for stripe wound for wound hip and thigh
what you sow he shall reap all justified by jealousy

it's not right that this man should be alone
just not right that he should be on his own
so you are made like him – uneven
preach the good and practice evil

the insolent cut down as grass
all others serve his perfect hand
thus to extend soul's frontiers
he is spinning rings of fear

it's not right that this man should be alone
so you are made like him – uneven
half a zealot, half a heathen
doubter/believer/doubter/believer

thus to extend soul's frontiers
he is spinning rings of fear
he gives and takes saves and slaughters
unsteady as earth unstable as water

one to one

(after Brecht)

the beginning
the dawn
the first stage of a necessary measure:
to map the earth
each inch of land
each wave the surf
each grain of sand
marked out for security
every passage short or long
every lock and every key
on a scale of one to one

and that's just the start

the beginning
the dawn
the first question in this line of thought
moves on to worse
it leads to more
each one the first
the first assault
the end's the same for every start
the same result to each first step
and every question's measured out
on a scale from one to ten

and there'll be no rest

an authority of spies
to monitor each step
but even they don't realise
the power of one brick in one hand
aimed from where a refuge used to stand
and that's just the start
and there'll be no rest
no scale to pit the dispossessed



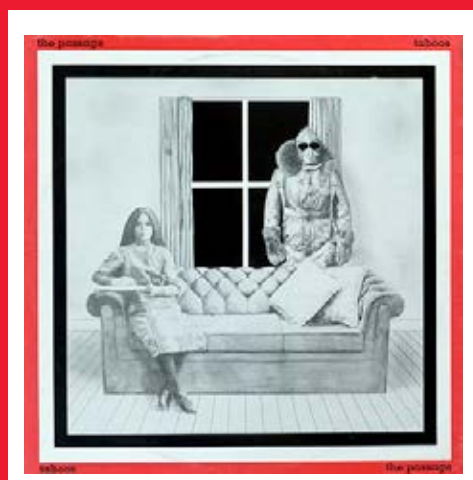
wave

who said this song and dance great escape?
who made bombs and flags state of play?
for everything you hear improve your aim to help us change
just as begun here comes another wave
(sounding us out)

no music in this song can drown them out
and there aren't words enough to shout them down
but every sound a chance to drench and drown the four estates
before we're done here comes another wave
(pushing us down)

no hands no gloves so strong to tear them down
no fingers stretch so far to prise them out
but every note struck out in fear in time to turn the scale
before the end they'll send another wave
(nothing but sound, only a sound, simply a sound)





keep away from the counter displays
the silver designs the white gowns the glass
don't handle those bottles they've got foreign names
i've learnt they're full of a leprosy gas
it looks just like water, but i hear it's called clone
don't let it get out, it won't leave you alone
it poisons the air, it turns it to stone

it's got the sperm of a whale, it's got the bile of a cat
it's got sex organs from a deer: i smell a rat
it's got the glands of a beaver, it's got naptha, it's got oil
it's got acid and copra and tar: it makes me boil

it's covered in boxes, they hide it in jars
it's trapped up in ribbons and tinsels and stars
and that's what it's for: pretty camouflage

it's got civet and benzone and rose, styrax and jasmine
and musketone
and citron and resin and phenyl-propyl-alcohol: it stinks

the shadows

even here, here's a space far from the heat
soak it down here through these shadows
even here out of view
cool, roam around safe in these shadows
how are they cast?
by the huge machine of the architect, the engineer,
 the mighty medalled
just a trick of the light, a fault of the system
examine all light for what it is, step inside, inside these shadows
shadows converge limitless no-one will ever tear up shadows
how are they cast?
by the artist upstaging the sun, the entertainer tiring the sun
just a trick of the light, a fault of the system
only here out of view, completely absorbed
your shadow vanishes
embrace the shadows, rest and brood



time will tell

over our heads a million lights
we took them to be signals
in this way we counted the time we'd spent
and the lengths we'd taken
this added to our sense of labour in vain
no result and every second counts
warnings are constantly given constantly
time's drained out by every beat of our heart
and what we used before
conspires against the here and now
this turns to dust what we were taught
by evangelists of every sort
now we know we were taken in
time runs like blood through an iron ring
and we took one for the other
time will tell

no idea and every second counts
caught in the coils of our own inventions
since who knows when

animal in me

abusement club
laser lights
overcrowd
mammonites

lots of love
wendy house
pay from the heart
sweat it out

in this place where no-one belongs
no space to prowl the animal in me

camouflage
overdone
there are eyes and
there are looks

all inside sing out to do or die
what kind of cage is this to pace the night?

paws drawn in
lie in wait
silent song
inanimate
hedonist
out of luck
paws flat out
empty husk

in this place where no-one belongs
all inside sing out to do and die
what kind of cage is this to pace the night?
no room to cruise the animal in me

the passage
enflame



keep
br ain
tidy

angleland

for fairer sex song of praise
angleland special place
attitude mate to mate
above rest of human race

what passes for passion in your eyes
keep it wrapped up out of sight

mincing meat, cigarettes
half a bitter, bitter sex
oven ready stuff it quick
vaccination little prick

bang bang you're dead
chop chop off head
that does for some
in angleland

short of breath, blooded face
every nerve under strain
in position keep it clean
missionary make ends meet

stab stab don't hurt
ay up nice pair
shag boiler bird
in angleland

island folk tidal flow
into harbour come and go
union jack harvest queen
done our duty, same time next week

what passes for passion in your eyes
keep it reigned in, anglicised

locust

they've taken time and life to run in circles
for you and me and them to run in circles
and you call it progress?
eight hours a day to earn a living
eight hours a day to sleep it off
eight hours a day to lose it
and when you're given any time out
you're only filling in the hours
between the earning end the spending:
but there are places
where time isn't counted in coins
somewhere else
time is a hole
where? look beneath you
we had the chance to change two worlds
we had the chance to change two worlds
we watched the clock too long
but oh! what a century
what an age for telling tales
the best of all possible times
the worst of all possible states
and for all the talk and all the teaching
we've only learnt one thing: the way of the locust



hip rebels

god, fashion
hoffmann la roche
it all adds up
and a floor to call your own
a garden of eden
add it up too
take from the total all that divides you
now we're even

crammed room, bouncing heads red light
a necklace or two bouncing around, several ties
fingers all thumbs something to say (can't think)
lying your head off 'just for today'

great great no really
great great great no really
now who thought this up?
hip rebels, night rebels, flush rebels
cruising for a good and useful life

go to seed

this bar, this floor, these lights, three walls
those oh so sounds, this dress, a line laid out – the best!
these replace carnal things, but deep inside: fear of sin

every hour, every night, we need this stuff (give it here)
are you still there? don't you dare uncut and rough
we're wired up to ride the storm on this plateau
right on the edge of earth and air: cascade control

you must be one of heaven's little dealers
we pray for you, we need your medicine, come and heal us

have you started? we feel nothing – keep it up
spinning the senses higher and higher it's never enough
lip to lip, tongue to tongue? no, up the nose
between the thighs, that far below? no, down the throat

we're sure you're one of heaven's little dealers,
we dance for you, we buy your medicine, come and heal us

less spaced, more speed, go to seed

the passage

for all



and none



drugface

the drug fits the face the drug fits the face
the drug fits the face the drug fits the face
the drug suits the place the drug sets the pace

joints and pins hands and face held up by wires
watch out this trunk torso frame pillar of fire
this alchemy this voodoo thing pray never stop
come doomsday fire put out drop dead by drop (oh no!)

current flowing down the spine
central nervous serpentine
blood and thunder through the veins
intra-venus hurricane

the drug fits the face – the drug suits the place
but whitecoat but whitecoat but whitecoat says:
not what i ordered – back to base

herb and soma border path beyond the bar
psycho-active over-edge this brain go far
the feeling fit the turning on hope never die
but climax slipping beat by beat ‘til back next time

the drug fits the face the drug suits the place
but whitecoat but whitecoat but whitecoat says:
you have stepped out of line, penalty – doing time
danger to society: paraldehyde change your mind
(one two three hit) – the drug makes the grade

sharp tongue

but there's a lot to be said (this plan)
for the way things are (so sharp)
there's a lot to be said (this plan)
for the way things are (go far)
an awful lot to be said (this plan)
on the way things are (a star!)
an awful lot to be said (der plan)
ich glaube n'est-ce pas?

this rebel mood that frozen look
your stock in trade – stack them up
chop and change them never stop
this way it seems you're coasting on
such acts will serve as right as rain
so tread the water steady pace
while wave on wave washes by

beware the wind and mark the tide
open fire shooting flare seize the fire set ablaze
open fire body heat like the sun so well hung sharp tongue
and motherland of coves and dykes
her straits her narrows nationwide
her state of play? leave well alone
some saving face some comatose
open fire shooting flare seize the fire set ablaze

open fire body heat like the sun so well hung sharp tongue
this plan so sharp this plan so tight

wind out of sail at cruising height
straight as the arrows flying blind
so every chance heat up the knife
stir the embers slash and burn
run for your life
open fire shooting flame seize the fire set ablaze
open fire body heat like the sun so well hung sharp tongue
(there's nothing more to be said)

**THIS HEAT
THE PASSAGE
GLASS ANIMALS**

000117

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART
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kickback

and so their minutes melt away
no need to know no more than night out into day
a strut of floor a breath of air
no point in time survey from here to back of there
the sweetest siren sound surround
sharp music making sense where mother tongue dumbfound
where hand in glove meets eye to eye
exchanging looks could kill drop curl away and die

out of date to make a living
state is taking unforgiving workout castaway
so every giro little freedom
major player for a season mind's eye ricochet

rush through the head and hit the nerve
keep cool well-hung and loose hold panic in reserve
chassée and swallow night away
sleek eyes and honey lines hold back to spend the day

shape the light day for night
unwind time after time

talk off the record overheard
outside of tracking time takes note a shifting world
most likely couples kept apart
eyes down and lost for words hold back the hand and heart
grab a bottle cataleptic
pick me up an anaesthetic blow out mind escape

envision off no sound required
some deaf and dumb to life outside stay in the shade

state of mind and second sight
rewind time after time

from bad to worse miss heart a beat
left foot and marking time right out no go defeat
try pose a question muscle in
why lie in wait the hands and face more fun to sin

shape the light day for night
unwind time after time



devils and angels

all this spinning – to what end?
maybe we've gone too far
maybe it's not begun
maybe very soon we'll get it right
it will turn out right
maybe we're spinning tombs and webs
and there's nothing ahead but this breath and shadow

then tomorrow
and then tomorrow
your lips, my voice
our sight, our hearts
this time and then tomorrow:
liberty

all this turning – where will it lead?
maybe very soon it will all come clear
perhaps this spinning has some point to it
perhaps we're spinning a sense of purpose
maybe many routes for these devils and angels
maybe we're spinning too all these devils and angels
perhaps we're tearing through some flesh, dark webs

and then tomorrow, and then tomorrow
your lips, my voice
our sight, our hearts
this time and then tomorrow:
liberty, one more time

horseplay

more than four hours since we started
can't take another night like this
you'd think by now we'd have discarded
courting games and dirty tricks

are you scared being made a fool of?
your winding ways suggest you're shrewd
daren't you risk being made a fool of?
clinging to the rituals

and all these shallow things you ask me
by chance extracted out of lists
we want the pleasure of our bodies
why should we crawl through all of this?
so sad let's dance the best we can

maybe you see us as a contest
the winner tells the biggest lies
i see you see us as a contest
and guess who's referee and prize

still afraid being made a fool of?
bothered by some tribal view?
daren't you risk being made a fool of
now you're numb with dope and booze?
too sad let's dance the best we can

it's gone five hours since we started
won't last another night like this
i'd hoped we would have disregarded
protocol and artifice

still afraid being made a fool of?
scared to death of honesty?
by keeping all these questions from you
i've made a bigger fool of me
so sad let's dance the best we can

taboos

i use this magazine that gives instructions
it tells me many things about seduction
it comes in monthly parts, there's 16 sections
i need nine more for the complete collection
in number six there's chapters on disorders
and number seven's all about withdrawal
in number eight there's pictures of positions
i'm stuck 'til I receive the next edition

*whoever hopes to dance with me
must abandon all such guides and schemes
and measure up one million ways and means
take to heart strange choreography*

we have to wait until we've read them through
with things like this we're better safe than sorry
i have it written here, four things to do
each one a cornerstone of carnal knowledge

it makes you go blind
by closing your mind
obstructing the view
too many taboos

we really should wait 'til we've read them through
you know we're always better safe than sorry
you see it written here a thousand rules
certain customs must be followed
perhaps these studies on cassette are wisest

while they play you try the exercises
just one of 15 minutes would be plenty
my body can't take all five C-120s

*whoever hopes to dance with me
must leave behind what's being heard and seen
and stepping through a thousand routes and dreams
take to heart new choreography*

it makes you go blind
enclosing the mind
too many to choose
two million taboos

let's wait until we've seen the tv series
programme titled 'all your bedroom queries'
you may well think i'm making lame excuses
i just don't like you knowing more than I do
my only option is to write about you
a verse or two of hollow lies about you
so you'd be flattered by my sharp perception
with words drawn up to drive deception

*whoever wants to dance with me
must abandon traps and trickery
take to heart new choreography
take by storm strange choreography*

it makes you go blind
by closing the mind
obstructing the view
too many taboos

the best of
the passage



seedy

watching you dance

the sense of release
watching you dance
pressing on air
through your thigh and your hands
the curve and the glide
the spin and the stride
the beat and the wave
the spring and the ride

escaping the earth
you're measuring space
shooting through air
the sensual pace
the bait of your body
the dance of your lips

you're driving me on
so perverse
it's more than a game
it's a release
i want to... sway
by your side
for ever

one-two-three

here is you and here is me
that's all very well and all very we
we are a pair, a pair alone
we share it all, our monotone

we fit together hand in glove
when one and one's a pair make love
two heads, two hearts, two tongues to prod
it's all too even – we need odd

one and one and one is three
one and one and one are we
swing me this way, that way too, i
love me best with you (and you)

for all the games that we prefer

whatever sex we need a third
but end up double single sex
so you know what should happen next
we need to find a game one more, for
two on one on one is four



armour

she stood dead still to start the game
intent her threat would turn her way
no muscle moved, he held the pose
no air allowed to stain his clothes
was this love? how could it be?
no audience no mirror near
a love affair? not in this place, no camera, no aftertaste

the double sense behind this second skin
turning panic into pleasure
self defence demands strong discipline
i only feel myself when under heavy pressure

a fear of sound all talk tabooed
the swishing chain the creaking shoe
was this love? of course it was
observe the pair so uninvolved
a love affair, the perfect place
no ticking clocks no time or space

two fortresses each armed the same
keen to lose the power game
no sign of blood no hint of breath
two latex torsos blind and deaf
was this love? how could it be
no naked light no sporting gear
a tough affair all start all stop
two slaving bottoms without a top

xoyo

no more no need for gents and ladies
no need no more for breeding babies
take in that torso – redesign
no more divide the body and mind

not a duty just an action you'll enjoy
for any boy and boy girl and girl and girl and boy
rub out those rules on who and how can procreate
xoyo triple x: sex mosaics (renegades!)

no need not here official facts of life
no time no need no more for husband wife
too many worn to bone too many fit to burst
'no point bun in the oven' bad to worse

no time no more for nature laws
who dreamt them up for us? commons, lords
no need not here not now for can't be done
taking your figure out for a ride is much more fun

all they've told you up til now put it in reverse
for any girl and girl boy and boy and boy and girl
forget about who and why and how and where and what you take
xoyo triple x: sex mosaics (renegades!)

(natural selection
in need of some correction
natural selection

i'm fighting this erection
don't be normal, just relax
take your time, lie on your back
and even then, when you've come
turn over quick and have more fun)

no more no need to save the last dance for heaven
antisocial sat on shelf talk to yourself forever
big g's choreography is sit watch time fly by
better whip the air and spin the mind much more divine!

not a duty just an action you'll enjoy
for any boy and boy girl and girl and girl and boy
rub out the rules on how and who can procreate
xoyo triple x: sex mosaics (renegades!)

(enough, no more, 'tis not so sweet now as it was before)

the passage
p|adrop



carnal

he said: since i saw you, since i met you
i've the craving to carry through
what my bible calls law
since i touched you, since i held you
i've taken aim, i've snared and hooked you
i want it all
you think you know what's coming next
it's nothing crude, i hate a mess
but you know the rules, the same each time
always muscles never minds
it's the way of the world
there's always a hunter, always a pet
active/passive, leader and led
burner and burned

she said: i know about words
i've seen some before
they fall out the mouth
and bump into walls
you've picked up the pieces
you've joined them with glue
i don't trust words
i don't trust you

he said: don't get me wrong, i'm here to help
you like romance, i've seen you melt
you're full of flaws
i don't mean love, i don't mean sex

i want the husk when nothing's left
blow it now, bang it later
i'll take the lead, you're second nature
look at dogs and books and wars

she said: it's just love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, car-nal

he said: don't get me wrong, i'm here to help
you like it hard, i've seen you felt

she said: what you say, what you mean
when you talk about sex
aren't the same things at all
you mean estate and effects
he said: but there's always the buyer, always the bought
active/passive, catcher and caught
burner and burned

she said: it's just love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, love,
love, love, love, car-nal

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PROBE RECORDS
VIRGIN RECORDS

ourselves

iceland and tenerife
on one line, on one line
arctic to equator
fire and ice
each place holds
an image of the other
aide-memoires
of distant lovers
such opposites
stand side by side
poles apart but
sharing time
this holds true
for you and me

iceland and tenerife
in one span, in one span
ice to water
rock to sand
correspondent
frost and flame:
burn or freeze
you always
seem at home
in the other

such things as these seem unparalleled
but greater still: ourselves

c iceland and tenerife

on one line, on one line

sometimes

it seems to me

you are

the two at once

such things as these outclass all wealth

but greater still: ourselves

tangled

two lines
two lines
coroner and corpse
and then a third
a victim
broken, a love of sex
the body with the mind
to make a third
a union

beyond this world there is no other
make it work, this union

hope
a little more is needed:
food and a floor
and air and sound
and water
and fun

starry night

darkness overstepping day
western sunset crimson rays
when daytime stress slides under mind
uncap cool bottles to unwind

when minutes more than any needed
and hours spread about the place
the beat of counted life receded
and deadlines die another day

so, weary and wasted together we do our best
exhausted, devoted and shameless, the night undress

night after night we come to this
on every breath and tethered limb
in idleness a cancelled kiss
too weak to bite too tired to rim

so drained and done-in together we try
twisting and turning, despairing, to kiss the night goodbye

present, present, present
sublime, sublime, sublime
settle down, down, down
screwing time

when we unveil the starry night
we slip into our bed to play

bathe each body in pale light
and paw away all trace of day
so weary and wasted together we try our best
cut powder, wide lines, the night ingest

present, present, present
sublime, sublime, sublime
settle down, down, down
doing time



dogstar

and i want you all, and this song
and i want you all to, and this song
and i want you all, and this tune
means so much to me, i want you all to know
it means as much to me as it means to you

my dog
my dog red
my dog red my dog red star
five-legged friend five-legged friend
my dog red star (get, star)
he may take his time, he'll be there by the end
red star go far (defect)

see red star snap and leap making marx with rubber teeth
see him sprint left to right made from wolf with man in mind
just my joke – bit of fun he's not daft: dog and gun

there are snakes in the grass
there are locusts hogging crops
but the mongrel called john bull
is the lowest of the lot

prick up ears scissor teeth
collar chain brought to heel
trained for work – carrot, boot
barbara woodhouse – rabid, shoot

there's piranhas in the pool
there's the stinging of the wasp
but the crossbreed name of bull is the meanest of the lot

scent to scent and line to line
point to point fire in sky

army mascot bully boy
spenser churchill oi oi oi
come on red bulldog breed
(but – sirius disappeared!)
bloody red seeing stars
torn apart by tiger teeth

and he lifted up his little doggy eyes to heaven and said:

scent to scent line to line
point to point fire in sky

bdr usa ddr jfk

i appreciate my interpreter translating my german
ish ich ish ich isfi ich ish bin
ish been ich bin ish been ich bin
nish bnsh

bin bin been been ich bin ish been
ich bin ish been ish been ich bin
i'm ein i'm nein i i
ish been ich bin ish been ich bnch
been i'm ich bin been i'm ich

romanus sum

bye bye bni bni

romanus sum

berliner bin be

romanus sum

berlin beelim berlin beelim
berlin beelim berlin ish been berlin
ish been berlin – been bell
ish been berlin belle ish been berlin
belle been berlin

i'm beelimb ich bin i'm beelimb ich bin
i'm beelimb beeline bleen burbly
ish ich ish been ich bin
ish been burbly
i'm ich bin ein ish been i'm beelimb
ish ich ish been ich bin
ish been i'm ich bin ein
ish been i'm er.. er... er



sunburn

sleep soundly natoland each town weather-eyed with armies
vigilantes never rest cranked up for war
this gun symbol of love this bullet hold the peace as
refugee deepest freeze behind closed doors

when southern cross flares up
so hot so hot
and some dance
some thunder
while the north in cold sweat
nails down its last
the ground shakes
collapse

(sun, burn the dead weight of these words)

hold up your heads thunderclap premonition heavy weather
over sharpville county antrim and haiphong armargh
no longer bear the strain passing out hammer trigger state of
pressure
every pore and every hair napalm bomb white feather tar

take comfort home affairs let loose the market forces
strike a bargain boxing match the great white hope
black markets den of thieves cut lines and racing horses
each bull and bear stocked and shared run down the slope

when southern cross flares up
so fierce so fierce
and now dance
now thunder
while the north in white light
nails down its last
the base splits
collapse
(sun, burn the dead heft of these words)

new way the west was won hue and cry reclamation
military cross relations few guns sharp words
round the hearth bring to light pipe of peace and tongues of fire
tête-à-tête heroic verse sound out unheard

tattoo

on the road ad nauseam
last sunday morning nottingham
if you were there city square would not believe
flags and caps, mounted horse, artillery
every street army occupied
battle call, ritual, cannon fire for those that died
armed force, cleaned guns to celebrate
death and pain – remembrance day (hallelujah)

no man's land remain from mind to mind
same hate, same place, some other time
the council chimes the church's bell
swung up to heaven and down to hell
such stilted ease much caught in passing heard
the language of the lost for words
not such noise sound least expect
this time round they line for dead

and everything here is an answer
and one or two are true
but all the dying they relive
blanked out next country rendezvous

from burma star to rome each show of strength
as yet so far renew no end
darker days are drawing on
finger drumming babylon

though everything here is an answer
and one or two are true are true
yet all the dying they remember
forgot next country rendezvous





eighth day

steering the ship of life as you travel on life's highways
steering the ship of life through the highs and lows of life's currents
there's one big thing you learn from life
and me and my brothers and sisters want to share this with you, right?
yeah sure right here right now (right on, right or wrong)

service with a smile never say nothing
a simple mark-up for the trouble dealing and cutting
sod all of life's punters the dumpy or thin
i give each a taste of my corner shop grin
sheep from goats
wheat from tares
chaff from wheat
split the hairs!
i'm honest to god
straight as a die
like a sleeping dog
let me lie
respect my stand
hands off my helping hand

i mind my own business and i'll tell you the truth
my eyes are trick mirrors reflecting your views
sheer honesty's cut with a million deceptions
so i deal in the kind that benefit me
respect my stand
hands off my helping hand

steering the ship of life as you travel on life's highways steering the ship
of life through the highs and lows of life's currents there's one big thing
you learn from life and me and my brothers want to share this with you
right (yeah right) right here right now right or wrong

when the riot's official i'll stand by with my band
serenading the rebels pressing coins in my hand (my helping hand)
and when liberty's dragged in i'll be clenching my fist

(my helping fist)

along with the others that never took risks

never say yes

never say no

never offend

never give out

nothing to say

everyone's friend

just a fair-is-fair rake-off

to build me a fence

the passage
degenerates



fear

they said: tell us who owns this place?
we said
you
they said: tell us, who runs this place?
but then we thought:
are they from down the road?
is this another trap?

they said: you're not very clear
tell us who runs this place?
we said
power
they said: not clear enough
tell us, who runs this place?
but then we thought:
are they from the back room?
are they from down the road?
is this the right word?
love?

but then we thought:
it's always the same
that things won't change
we've nothing to lose
and so we agreed
we'd tell them the truth

they said:

you're free to go if you say that again
you're free to go if you say love again
tell us who runs this place
but we said
fear
that one word fucked their heart



form and void

*and i want you all to breathe in and out
to breathe in...and out...any time you like
in...and out and in...and out and in
you've got it...that's right*

and so it says:

what i've read before, from beginning to end
i'm reading it now: i'll do it again and again
and again and again
in this way i satisfy my every sense

but i'm all alone here, bit of a rut
want to break out, i'm too wrapped up (and out)
there are these two things both required
with these two things i'll be inspired

i need chance and an audience

these things move me to dazzling heights of tyranny
in this way i'm helping others to help myself
god's little helpers breathe new life in to me

inhale, exhale, or go to hell

and so it says:

from what was once shadow let there be light
find myself a shadow, draw in the night
but above all i need to show

that i've escaped you trash below

and i will make maquettes of me
to mark each step of where i've been

i need chance and an audience

and so it says:

he was able to build, drew up a plan
there was the water, below that the land,
he held them apart, one in each hand
in this one the water, the other the land
he could split his time into day and night
but that was the problem – what could he unite?
he could fashion light into low and high
but that was his weakness: he couldn't unite
he cried:

whip up the paste, examine the cracks
patch things up, stick them back
so there's one more device i must pioneer
and this will unite all: endless fear

i just need chance and an audience

and such things will sink them to greater depths of
flattery

in this way i'm using others to do my work
so, god's little helpers, don't breathe a word

empty words

into the night
the days to come
absent minds
opium
drift to sleep
seed blown
the turns of chance
nature notes

then there are some with all their grace
will give us hope on our return
and melt away our sense of shame
with eyes and lips and not a word
then their dancing drives us back into the world
and not a sign they help us change
of those we know these are their names:

. - - . . - . . - . - - - - . . - . - - . - - .
- . - - - . . - . . - . - - . - - - - -
. . - . - . .

self defence
words too hollow
lay down the pen
a word'll follow
every sentence
marching feet
twist of spiral
set you free

.....
.....
.....

.....
-
.....

Afterword

The lyrics in this book were written by me between 1978 and 1983. I did so to provide songs for the band I was in. For the most part I sang them on stage and in recordings (vinyl or radio, later transferred by LTM to compact disc). When we performed live I didn't remember the lines very well and I may have changed some words, so long as the rhythms fitted. In an early gig we did at Goldsmiths' College in London, John Cooper Clarke was on before us, carrying a plastic Tesco bag stuffed with his poems. He got to 'I Married A Monster From Outer Space' and rattled it off until suddenly he got stuck. A little lad in front of him who knew it word for word fed him the lines until the end, Johnny staring anxiously at his prompt. I see that nowadays bands like Wire have their texts autocued through a laptop. So, this book is my autocue and my little lad.

According to the philosopher George Steiner, music translates the lyric and the composer is therefore a translator. This assumes, by the way, that the lyric comes first (Rodgers and Hart, among many, started with the music). To my way of thinking the words are functional in that they intimate meaning to the rhythm. When I started writing these lyrics I was influenced by the American composer John Cage, who had been called 'America's greatest poet' by those piddlers who hated his music but had to acknowledge his preeminence. In order to get rid of ego when composing, Cage used chance procedures that 'let sounds be sounds'. I

tried chance procedures – coin tossing (I-Ching) – but found the whole thing too elaborate for its purpose. I worked on a simpler system using, instead of three coins, three words (the ‘fear, power, love’ mentioned in fear) and worked outward from their combinations. I later had dealings with Cage and told him about the lyrics. He laughed (he always laughed) and replied, ‘Well don’t let those words paint you into a corner’ (I wish he’d said ‘into a passage’). Seeing these lyrics in one place now shows me how many corners I’ve backed into. You can see, for example, how an instruction hits the choruses of dark times: the chorus should avoid rhyme.

These songs were written in Manchester, but I don’t think that we were especially considered to be a ‘Manchester band’, even though Steve Morrissey once auditioned to join us – we thought he’d be too high maintenance for the likes of us, and so he proved. But we were part of the Manchester Musicians’ Collective, as were The Fall and Joy Division, and there was something special about the way a set of alliances strengthened that music scene. In fact, the most famous tune of that period, recognised world-wide, is surely Joy Division’s ‘Love Will Tear us Apart’. But the story goes that it was written by another Collective band called the Manchester Mekon (to distinguish them from a Leeds band called The Mekons). Their tune was called ‘Cake Shop Device’. Joy Division asked to use it and, I’m told, even borrowed the Mekon’s guitar to get the sound right when they recorded it.

The Passage toured Europe, Scandinavia and North America, but it was only in the First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis that we truly found our feet. In this danceteria, made famous by Prince, the audience milled about for the first number but danced to the opening of the second, with a rolling drum rhythm that foxed the British but got this people-of-colour crowd moving, and they stayed dancing until the set ended. We went back to Britain evangelical to get toes tapping, thinking ‘We can do it!’. If I remember rightly, Hooky of New Order told me that they had a similar experience. Our songs actually referred to dancing, but few on these shores got the hint. Of course, dancing means sex too, and we sometimes had the same problem there.

I’m pleased that there is now a club in London’s Shoreditch named after my song ‘xoyo’ (I’ve also had a Brighton lesbian comedy club named after me: The Dyke Wits). But it was for a full-on dance track that Moby sampled ‘drugface’. I was once on the dancefloor in a Brixton club and heard my voice sampled, but on a different track from Moby’s. While it was playing I went over to the DJ and asked him what it was. He shouted back, ‘Dunno, some Italian shit’. That put things in perspective, as – to me – does this book, for which I thank and blame Todd Swift.

Dick Witts

with regards to Joe McKechnie and Andy Wilson.



[illegible]



no more no need for gents and ladies
no need no more for breeding babies
take in that torso - redesign
no more divide the body and mind

NOT A DUTY JUST AN ACTION YOU'LL ENJOY
FOR ANY BOY AND BOY GIRL AND GIRL AND GIRL AND BOY
RUN OUT THE RULES ON HOW AND WHO CAN PROCREATE
AD YO TRIPLE X: SEX MOSAICS (RENEGADES!)

no need not here official facts of life
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no time no more for nature laws
who dreamt them up for us? commons lords
no need not here not now for can't be done
taking your figure out for a ride is much more fun (here's how it's done)

ALL THEY'VE TOLD YOU UP TO NOW PUT IT IN REVERSE
FOR ANY GIRL AND GIRL BOY AND BOY AND BOY AND GIRL
FORGET ABOUT WHO AND WHY AND HOW AND WHERE AND WHAT YOU TAKE
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(NATURAL SELECTION	don't be normal, just relax
IN NEED OF SOME CONNECTION	take your time, lie on your back
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better whip the air and spin the mind much more divine!





